

From: [Crossland, Ronnie](#)
To: [Fife, Greg](#)
Cc: [Petersen, Chris](#); [Webster, Susan](#); [McQuiddy, David](#); [Smith, Monica](#)
Subject: Fw: Fire in Athens TX - WFAA News
Date: Thursday, May 29, 2014 9:29:26 PM

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone.

From: Gray, David
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 9:09 PM
To: Curry, Ron; Edlund, Carl; Edlund, Carl; Coleman, Sam
Cc: Phillips, Pam; Crossland, Ronnie
Subject: RE: Fire in Athens TX - WFAA News

by JASON TRAHAN, JASON WHITELY, and BRETT SHIPP WFAA

Posted on May 29, 2014 at 6:56 PM

Updated today at 8:56 PM

DALLAS — Firefighters have evacuated the town square in Athens because of a large fire a block away that burned down a facility that stores ammonium nitrate fertilizer.

That is the same fertilizer that exploded at a storage facility in the town of West, Texas, in April 2013, killing 15 people.

Thursday's fire started about 5:30 p.m. according to resident Billie Morse. It's uncertain what sparked the fire, but images on social media showed large flames shooting into the air. The building at 105 W. Larkin St. is owned by East Texas Ag Supply.

- [Click here](#) to see where all ammonium nitrate storage facilities are located in Texas

Emergency responders evacuated people within a three-block area. Nothing has exploded at this facility, and there are no reports of injuries.

Firefighters were not spraying water on the flames. At 7:20 p.m. most of the flames were extinguished, but firefighters still had not closed in on the building.

Only the cinder block walls remain standing while white smoke rises.

Athens has a population of 12,000 people in Henderson County, which is about 70 miles southeast of Dallas.

The crumbling cinderblock and wooden structure has been the focus of News 8 investigations several times in recent months.

Nothing illegal has happened there, but several times a week, a chemical truck pulls up in front and unloads tons of ammonium nitrate fertilizer. A News 8 viewer [sent us photos earlier this month](#) of an ammonium nitrate delivery at the same facility.



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After the West explosion, Athens resident Charles Spann became suspicious of what was going on in the building just off the town square.

"A facility like this, if it blew, it could take down the annex and hurt a lot of innocent people," Spann told News 8 in June 2013.

This wasn't the first fire threat recently for the Athens warehouse. In November 2013, a restaurant across a narrow street from the building caught fire. Flames shot into the air as firefighters struggled to gain control. The restaurant was a total loss. The fertilizer warehouse escaped harm in that incident.

In the wake of the West, Tx., explosion, the Texas Department of Insurance, which oversees the state fire marshal's office, [issued a notice stressing best practices for storing ammonium nitrate](#). It recommends having proper sprinklers in storage facilities and no wooden storage bins.

Late last year, State Fire Marshal Chris Connealy embarked on a series of meetings with officials across Texas warning them about housing ammonium nitrate in wooden structures. The roof and interior of the Athens building is mostly wood, just like in West.

According to its website, the fire marshal's office has visited Henderson County twice, on April 3 and March 3. Despite warnings, the facility has continued to get multi-ton deliveries of ammonium nitrate.

Thursday evening, the mayor of Athens told News 8 that there is currently ammonium nitrate in the facility.

When News 8 started asking questions about the downtown Athens fertilizer depot in May 2013, Athens Fire Chief John McQueary said he was aware of what was in the building and that the building was safe.

He later told the local newspaper "...that ammonium nitrate is not going to go off; we're going to be able to put that out." On Thursday, firefighters appeared to have let the building burn and instead evacuated the immediate area -- a tactic recommended by fire experts.

After News 8 exposed the dangers at the Athens facility in June 2013, local officials organized a local emergency planning committee, as required by federal law to plan for chemical emergencies. Prior to our stories, the county had not had such a committee.

The local businessman who runs the Athens fertilizer facility has refused to go on camera talking about potential dangers at the facility. He was [recently honored as "agriculturist of the year"](#) by the townspeople in Athens, according to news accounts.

State health officials say there are 129 buildings across the state storing dangerous levels of ammonium nitrate.

E-mail jwhitely@wfaa.com

From: Curry, Ron
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 9:02 PM
To: Gray, David; Edlund, Carl; Edlund, Carl; Coleman, Sam
Cc: Phillips, Pam; Crossland, Ronnie
Subject: Re: Fire in Athens TX

Thank you for the updates.

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone.

From: Gray, David
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 8:47 PM
To: Edlund, Carl; Edlund, Carl; Coleman, Sam; Curry, Ron
Cc: Phillips, Pam; Crossland, Ronnie
Subject: Re: Fire in Athens TX

Lots of online press reports

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone .

From: gray.david@epa.gov
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 8:38 PM
To: Edlund, Carl; Edlund, Carl; Coleman, Sam; Curry, Ron
Cc: Phillips, Pam; Crossland, Ronnie
Subject: Re: Fire in Athens TX

Thanks

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone .

From: Edlund, Carl
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 8:37 PM
To: Edlund, Carl; Gray, David; Coleman, Sam; Curry, Ron
Cc: Phillips, Pam; Crossland, Ronnie

Subject: Re: Fire in Athens TX

Ronnie just called with an update. This facility MAY have ammonium nitrate so we are coordinatong with TCEQ on response actions needed.

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone.

From: Edlund, Carl
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 8:26 PM
To: Gray, David; Coleman, Sam; Curry, Ron
Subject: Fw: Fire in Athens TX

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone.

From: Fife, Greg <fife.greg@epa.gov>
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 7:47 PM
To: R6 Response Notify
Subject: Fire in Athens TX

Fire in Athens, TX.

At approximately 6:15 CST, a fire broke out at what is reported to be East Texas Ag Supply. No explosion was reported.

EPA is still investigating and assessing the situation. It does appear that the fire is under control and about out. Material involved in the fire is not known to EPA at this time.

The facility is near downtown Athens, and separated from residences by only a railroad track. An evacuation was called by the County Sheriff.